



News from

Congressman Ron Kind

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S THIRD
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

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Restoring Honest Leadership and Open Government

By Congressman Ron Kind

Like many of you, I am disheartened by the recent reports of ethical misconduct involving powerful lobbyists and high-ranking lawmakers. The way these individuals took advantage of the public trust and acted in their own personal interest is disgraceful. This kind of behavior has no place in the Congress, and those who broke the law must be held accountable.

With public office comes a great responsibility to maintain a high ethical standard that I take very seriously. What I find unfortunate is that the actions of a self-interested few end up casting a shadow of public doubt over our government and those of us who work hard to uphold the laws and values of our democracy. The challenge now is to work even harder to restore trust and accountability in the way government conducts itself.

Reforming the ethics process must involve both a tightening of rules as well as a commitment to uphold and enforce the laws we already have on the books. I have proposed an Honest Government Initiative which includes a number of ideas to crack down on ethics abuses and preserve the integrity of government by improving the enforcement of existing law, requiring more stringent lobbying disclosure, and enhancing ethics oversight.

Many of these ideas are embedded in the Special Interest Lobbying and Ethics Accountability Act (H.R. 2412), which I am an original cosponsor of. The bill, which was introduced in the spring of 2005, would enhance lobbying disclosure, curb excesses in privately funded travel, and slow the revolving door between government and lobbying jobs.

I believe that part of the problem is also the inefficacy of the House Ethics Committee. Recent rule changes have weakened the committee's ability to act on ethics complaints made against lawmakers, including a practice which lets a complaint die if the committee cannot decide whether it should be investigated within 45 days.

It is simply not enough for Congress to have a code of conduct; we must uphold that code by enforcing the rules and holding violators accountable. That is why I have a proposal to break through ethics committee stalemates and automatically refer cases to a special prosecutor if the committee becomes deadlocked.

The burden of responsibility to maintain an honest and open government, however, does not just fall on the Ethics Committee-it falls on each publicly elected official who makes a pact with the people to honor the Constitution, uphold the law, and act in the public interest, not self-serving special interests. While it is clear that reforming the ethics process is necessary and long overdue, restoring integrity to government requires an unconditional commitment to honest leadership and a transparent government where no one is exempt from honoring the public trust, regardless of his or her position or rank.

Rep. Kind's Honest Government Initiative is available on Kind's Web site: <http://www.house.gov/kind/>. House Democrats will unveil their comprehensive Honest Leadership and Open Government agenda on January 18, 2006.

Congressman Kind is a Democrat representing Wisconsin's Third Congressional District.